

Online Art Communication Model in the Context of COVID-19: The National Theater Company of Korea as an Example

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the traditional offline model of many arts industries to a standstill, and many are beginning to survive through streaming platforms. Public theaters in many countries are producing copyrighted theatrical content into digital content and distributing artistic content with streaming. There are many creative models, such as the case of this paper, the Online NTCK, which has established a sustainable business model for online arts by operating an OTT platform with exclusive rights. Through the analysis of the case of Online NTCK, this paper discusses the impact of digital technology on online art communication, the change of the business model of physical theaters and the innovative opportunities and possibilities that OTT technology will bring to the art industry.

Keywords: Online theater, digital theater, online art communication, Korean theater market

1. Introduction

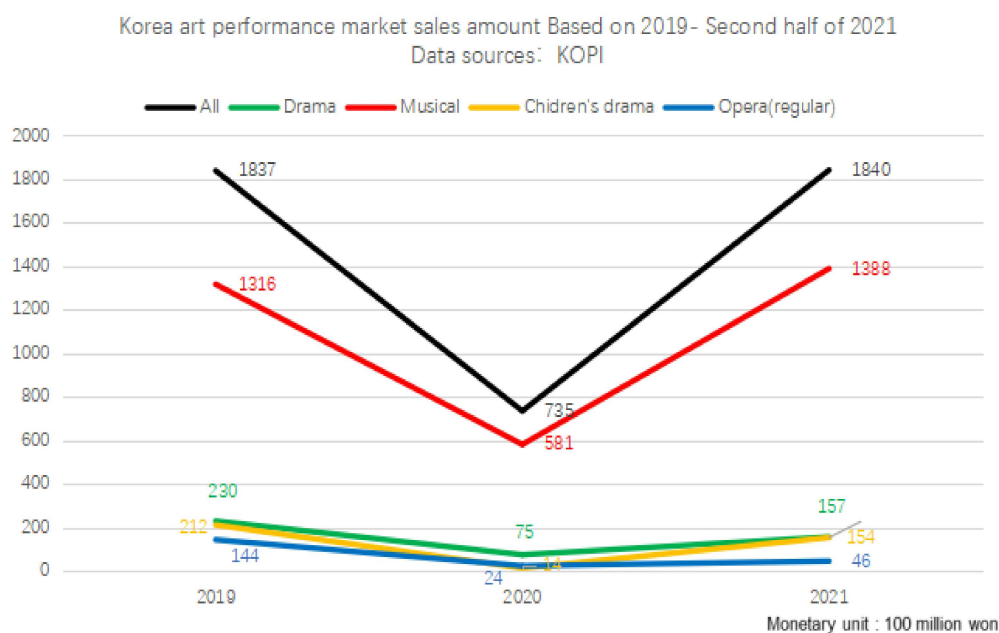
COVID-19 has continued to suffer a huge impact on the physical industry worldwide for more than two years, and this impact is far-reaching and lasting, changing much of human consumption behavior. Art industries that have been operating in the offline communication mode such as; theater, concerts, art exhibitions, etc. have become the most devastated by the epidemic, and theater operations around the world have been hit continuously because of various quarantine policy measures, and the model of offline viewing of plays staged in physical theaters has been compulsively suspended. Many theaters and art groups are trying to continue their performances by live streaming or uploading video content in order to stay open during the pandemic.

The Korean performance industry also suffered similarly huge losses, with sales in the performance market in 2019, the year before the epidemic, at 183.7 billion won, according to KOPIS Korea. After plummeting to 73.5 billion won in 2020 following the epidemic, sales grew back to 184 billion won by the second half of 2021, a slight increase from the pre-epidemic year of 2019. Although the number of performances and audiences are still down compared to pre-epidemic levels, sales are back to 2019 levels, but the temporary rebound in performance industry sales is not a sign of optimism.

According to the data, only the music and classical music segments of the Korean performance

market recovered as of the second half of 2021 by performance type, boosting overall sales. But the mainstays of the industry, theater and dance, are still in the dumps, with sales of only 13.7 billion won, only 58% of what they were in 2019. Now with the continued emergence of the variant strains worldwide in 2022 and the continuation of the epidemic causing uncertainty about the recovery of daily life, the full recovery of the Korean performance industry is still not optimistic.

Table 1 Korea art performance market sales amount Based on 2019- Second half of 2021



Against this challenging backdrop, the National Theater Company of Korea (NTCK) announced on November 1, 2021 the launch of "online theater on.ntck.or.kr", a fee-based online theater content provision service for the Korean market based on its own OTT platform. This is an innovative solution for public theaters in Korea in the face of the long-term epidemic and the constant challenges to the offline performance model. NTCK, dedicated to traditional offline distribution, has established a streaming platform to provide content services for theatre productions for the first time in its 70-year history, with the goal of making the online theatre the "fourth theatre" in addition to the three existing physical theatres in the Korean market. The artistic director of NTCK explained the positioning of the online theater: We want to provide a new experience for the audience, not just recording live performances and offering them as video content. Korean media said that the establishment of the online theater of NTCK Company has brought the Korean art industry into the OTT era.

2. Case study: innovative model of online theater

2.1 Business strategy

Online NTCK is a paid OTT platform for watching plays or dramas online. The online theater can be accessed at any time, and audiences who cannot attend the physical theater in person can watch the

productions of the NTCK through video whenever and wherever they are at their convenience.

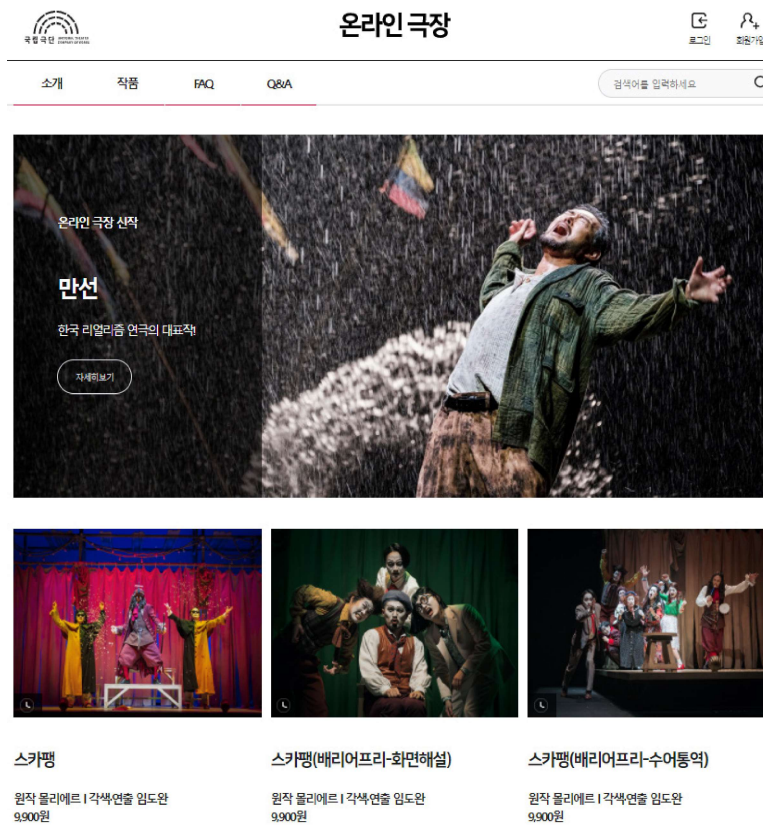


Figure 1 Homepage of Online NTCK

In terms of business strategy, in order to watch the productions of the online NTCK, consumers need to register as a member of the NTCK's official website. On-demand theater content all needs to be purchased separately at an average price of 9,900 won, with no monthly subscription service. Tickets for live online theater can be purchased in the same way as tickets for physical theater, through the official website and authorized merchants, and the pricing is the same, with no special discounts for tickets for online performances. The Korea National Theater online theater has also launched an opening promotion for example and has conducted some opening discounts. The tickets for the online live theater are the same as those for the physical theater and can be purchased through the official website and authorized merchants.

The online theater viewing method allows PC, cell phone, tablet and other devices, and each ID can register up to three devices. Each ID can only be viewed on one device at a time. Due to copyright issues, downloads are not available and can only be watched online using a dedicated player. Purchased videos must be viewed on-demand within 7 days on-demand can be viewed repeatedly within 3 days after the permission expires and needs to be paid for again, which is different from other OTT forms in terms of membership.

2.2 Optimization of the online viewing experience

The pricing strategy for online theater is not a low price or strategy, nor does it use a monthly subscription system. Given the weakness of the online viewing model, this fee strategy tests the online theater experience. Online theater is carefully designed to compensate for some of the problems that may be encountered in the viewing experience. For example, all performances of NTCK do not use microphone radios, and such a performance method may lead to a situation where the online audience cannot hear the lines clearly because of problems with the live audio signal transmission. Therefore, Online Theatre provides a subtitle option on the playback interface to compensate for the lack of transmission of audio signals.

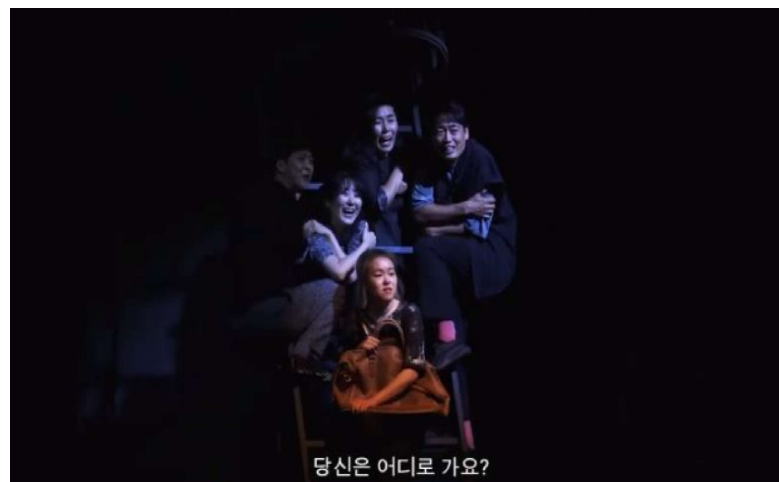


Figure 2 Online drama video and synchronized subtitles

Video screen according to the different design of each performance stage, to provide a multi-angle all-round view of the stage of different shots, the audience can also watch online when the independent choice, this independent way of viewing to create a traditional offline theater to watch the performance can not experience a new visual experience. Online theater before the start of the show, tips online audience some ways to improve the viewing experience. For example: audiovisual audience can be projected to a larger screen such as TV and projection screen and reduce the room light to obtain a better experience close to the real theater environment; if the audience wants to feel the details and a sense of live sound will be prompted before the performance.

2.3 Focus on consumers' needs

After the official operation of the online theater by NTCK Company, a series of innovations were offered around its own online theater. For example, the operator surveyed and analyzed the viewing behavior of the 50,000 existing members of the National Theatre Company website and surveyed the audience's preferences in different aspects such as price, schedule, and viewing style, and the audience proposed a series of improvement plans for physical consumption and experience based on the existing Internet platform.

For example, sign language narration is provided for some specific productions, and the online theater offers three versions: regular version, sign language interpreted version, and on-screen narration version. At present, online theater only provides accessible versions of a few works. Providing more accessible plays in the future is also the development direction of online theater's differentiated services.



Figure 3 Drama Scapin sign language translation version screenshot

For the general audience of online theater, some plays also provide "Director's Cut" which is only available on demand in online theater. The "Director's Cut" is a film term that refers to a version of a film or television play that is re-edited and processed according to the director's will, which is different from the officially released version and has more of the director's artistic style and personal expression, and even adds the original deleted plot and images. Generally recorded theatrical video content due to the limitations of the stage performance, in the camera language is basically more monotonous panoramic, close up, the sequence of scenes is also shot with the movement of the actors.

While the online theater special director's cut version of the play, the work is more different angles and scenes into the camera images according to the mood of different images also have close-up or superimposed changes, in accordance with the director's personal interpretation of the drama, the content of the theater video montage of cinematic editing processing, theater video creativity and processing, to novel content to attract consumers to browse the online theater.

3. Technology and art: innovation in communication methods

3.1 OTT technology and the art industry

The theater industry, which has always depended on offline performances to provide audiences with a live experience and artistic experience, suffered an unprecedented impact on its operations during this particular period because it had to comply with the policy of quarantine, including other

music performances, movies, and exhibitions that needed to gather in the same space, all of which suffered closures. In the front of the sudden epidemic, the theater performance, an ancient art form in human history, received restrictions on the scene of live performances.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the art industry has been in a paradoxical situation, and a study by Radermecker, A. S. V. points out that the paradoxical issue for the art industry in the post-epidemic era is recovery and consumption, although the demand for cultural and creative content increased throughout the lockdown, and web access became more important than ever, and in terms of consumption indicators the art industry was inevitably is one of the most affected industries and probably one of the slowest to recover. Measures of recovery, beyond initiatives such as surveys or data collection aimed at providing financial and logistical support to artists and arts venues, will require scholars and practitioners alike to think together about the future of arts consumption, especially from the perspective of the consumer.[1] Digital technologies like OTT have opened a new window of consumption for the arts industry, and in some areas of artistic performance we are already seeing the possibility of converting artistic content into digital In some areas of performing arts, we are already seeing the possibility of converting artistic content into digital streams and achieving good revenues.

As the service function of OTT has evolved, it has come to represent more than just "providing video services to subscribers bypassing traditional cable systems, live-to-home satellite TV systems, etc.".[2] OTT has now been expanded through digital technology to enable real-time delivery of video content to personal electronic devices via the Internet. Many industries making digital changes in the midst of the epidemic have been successful in enabling profitable business. With OTT moving into a more widespread commercial phase driven by the epidemic, the arts performance industry is beginning to adopt OTT platforms more often as the primary means of distributing their theatrical productions.

Some of the more successful cases of OTT use in theater performances are NT Live, a groundbreaking digital theater project launched by the National Theatre (UK) in June 2009, which uses digital media technology to present plays originally performed live only at the National Theatre in the UK to a global audience in the form of streaming video. It has been widely acclaimed for its high degree of accessibility, topicality and outstanding quality of content. Not only does it monetize through viewers' on-demand payments, but it also does so by attracting audiences interested in theater to the physical theater effect through video content. Therefore, it is often praised as the best example of digitalization of theater content. The artistic director of NTCK Company also said in an early report that NT Live is the target for NTCK Company's online theater to catch up with, and that the long-term goal of the online theater establishment is to introduce NTCK Company's plays to a wider audience.

3.2 Controversy of digitalization of theatre

Those who resist OTT platforms argue that the scenes and experiences of theater and art cannot be replicated, that the unique viewing relationship between actors and audience is the essence of theater's charm, and that the artistic value is only complete when the theater atmosphere is experienced in person. The mode of recorded digital video distribution like OTT destroys the 3D and immediacy of the environment, and that works in streaming formats affected by this can leave audiences

disappointed. However, because the live nature of theater makes it very fragile and cannot be shown simultaneously in licensed theaters across the country or around the world like a film print can, leaving the audience very limited, the definition of theater can also be mobile and not limited to theater and live as society evolves. Tracing the history, the birth of cinema is a product of industrialization and technological development.[3] The birth of cinema is a product of technological progress born in the era of industrialization and technological development. Advances in video technology have made the art of cinema the greatest beneficiary of technological development.

Streaming media can now deliver higher-definition and more realistic images, and can even incorporate sensory-expanding technologies such as VR AR to bring an immersive viewing experience. It is clear that the changes brought about by technology are more of a change in the means of communication and the way of viewing, and that technology can make certain qualities of artistic performances disappear, as well as bring new creativity. Following the general trend of digital development in the market, sticking to tradition and not trying new ways of interpretation would obviously bring a crisis to the sustainable operation of the theater, and the COVID-19 pandemic has proved this for us. Contemporary audiences' attitudes toward art have also changed, as Kang, Yunju and Chie, Hye Won's study of the social dimensions of contemporary art points out: the public's view of art is gradually shifting from an "art supremacist perspective," in which art can only be created by a few artists, to an "artistic supremacist perspective. art supremacist perspective" to the "living art perspective" in which "everyone can engage in art activities".[4] It is clear that the survival of the art industry today is also faced with the choice between the audience and the market. Conflicts also continue to emerge in the both the development of the market and the pursuit of art by some artists.

Due to the epidemic, most of the performances of NTCK to commemorate its 470th anniversary in 2020 were unable to be staged in physical theaters. In the first half of 2020, a video recording of previous performances was released publicly through a "web screening" held on the official YouTube channel. In the second half of the same year, videos of some of the productions were produced and uploaded to video sites. Although there are legal issues involved in uploading copyright-protected content to video sites, this is a preliminary exploration of the online theater viewing model.

The use of digital media body dissemination, with the use of streaming technology to allow theater to the big screen, computers and cell phones and other small screens for dissemination, the spread of effect is far greater than the theater, but to a certain extent to make up for the limitations of the traditional theater dissemination. OTT mode of communication under the lack of theater integrity but let the classic works of art can be more audience in a longer range of viewing, such a compromise is also the theater business approach can This compromise is also a good way for theaters to keep up with the changing times.

3.3 Policy and Dissemination Model

The production and promotion of online theater by NTCK is mainly based on top-down approaches such as government support, funding, multi-channel financing, online performance infrastructure construction, and digital dissemination. The government's main model of cultural management is "government-led and private participation," in which the government manages cultural development from a macro level and makes plans for it but does not dominate the direction of culture

in specific matters. While providing financial support, the government does not run culture on a micro level, nor does it interfere with the implementation of specific cultural projects, but provides a good market environment for cultural development through sound laws and regulations, and strives to play the role of a supervisor.[5] The government maintains such an appropriate distance from arts organizations to effectively avoid common arts management problems such as the disconnect between repertoire and market and the lagging development of theater autonomy.

The development and operation of online theater for NTCK has also received funding from the Korean government, and on September 9, 2020, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism announced the COVID-19 Daily Life Uncontact Art Support program to fund long-term video projects for Korean public art institutions. This is an "online media support program" by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to help art and performance groups in the epidemic era. 2020 will invest 14.9 billion won in cooperation with 17 metropolitan cultural funds to provide focused support to encourage artists to develop online performance projects, explore new profit models, and attract audiences while The project aims to encourage artists to develop online performance projects, explore new profit models, and attract audiences participating in uncontact online art performance activities. The necessary infrastructure for online performances is also included in the government's support program. Arts organizations represented by NTCK are leading the way in establishing online performance models in Korea, such as the Seoul Arts Center, which combines performance with immersive technology, and the National Theater of Korea, which has established a platform where classic performances from home and abroad can be viewed online in high-definition video. Considering the characteristics of each field such as performance, literature and art, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Korea plans to push the expansion of overseas dissemination of Korean art through online technology and uncontact methods.[6]

Thanks to the Act, NTCK Company has received 1 billion won to support the production of digital videos of outstanding plays and the establishment of a well-serviced OTT platform, which provides the basis for the online promotion and dissemination of the group's plays. "A virtuous circle" is what the operators of NTCK repeatedly said when promoting the online theater, which allows more audiences to access excellent theater through the OTT platform. The artistic director of NTCK Company said in an interview: "The effect of online promotion and dissemination of plays through online theaters and official YouTube video accounts has met expectations, and even in the post-epidemic era, the development of these online video businesses is of practical significance, putting aside the controversy over the digitalization of theaters, and through new technologies and methods, it has also played a role in the development of public theater. The digitalization controversy aside, the new technology and methods also play a role in popularizing the arts and spreading good theater in the society, as well as reducing the cost of access to theater for disadvantaged groups and addressing some of the disconnects caused by regional development and cultural differences. The concept of this kind of business has become a principle that supports the future development of online theater.

4. The value of online theater: an extension of physical theater

4.1 Business strategy Genre and content innovation of theater

Regardless of the changes in the form of theatrical communication, the concept of "theater" as a theatrical gathering is based on the content of repertoire. The author has compiled the resident repertoire of the online theater of NTCK in 2021, and examined the brand positioning and content strategy of NTCK for the online theater from the genre of the repertoire.

Table 2 Theatrical Repertoire in Online NTCK

Repertoire (in Korean)	Repertoire (in English)	Duration	Special versions
파우스트 엔딩	Faust Ending	106 min	-
X의 비극	The Tragedy of X	97 min	-
조씨고아, 복수의 씨앗	phan of Zhao	145 min	Director's cut version
알려지지 않은 예술가의 눈물과 자이툰 파스타	Unknown Artist's Tears and Zaytoon Plaster	126 min	-
스카팡	Scapin	125 min	Screen commentary version/Sign language version
만선	Maansun	111 min	-

The plays currently on display at the Online Theatre are mainly local Korean classics. There are six resident plays plus three special editions, which are the works of NTCK, as well as works purchased under copyright. Plays such as Faust Ending, The Tragedy of X, Orphan of Zhao, Unknown Artist's Tears and Zaytoon Plaster, Scapin, etc. have a high reputation in the Korean theater market, and the works themselves are well-known and of high quality, attracting more audiences familiar with these plays. audiences to experience the new online versions. The productions are individually filmed and produced for the best online presentation. Unlike the recorded versions, the content and images of these plays are more beautiful and complete, and special versions, such as the director's cut and accessible versions, are available.



Figure 4 Drama filming scene

In terms of the type of repertoire, the video content of Online Theatre is balanced between film and theater. The plays chosen are all classic plays, and the images are still presented in the mode of stage performance rather than filmic framing. The director took into account the characteristics and artistic expression of the plays and optimized and improved the language of the images without imitating the films. The director used a different filming technique from the film and did the editing himself to ensure the originality and the authenticity of the theatrical work, emphasizing the difference between theater and film.

4.2 Extension of physical theater

Contemporary society has formed a uncontact mode of social operation due to the far-reaching impact of COVID-19. Perhaps the viral influence might disappear afterwards, but this uncontact model is expected to carry on for a long time replacing many of the offline scenes of the past, and many industries will have to adapt to this change. This article discusses the crisis and problems brought by COVID-19 to dramatic art and physical theater and based on these problems think about how to accurately locate the impact of online theater on the development of theater in the future.

Practitioners in the art industry today are in an era where they need to experiment and create themselves in order to survive. The physical theater also needs to rethink its role, either from the perspective of profitability or dissemination of art, or to create innovative content and distribution models that are better suited to digital distribution. Hie, Hye Won believe that as the boundaries between performance and video become lower and lower, we need to expand our thinking. Rather than simply capturing the stage with video, the flexibility to accept changes in the distribution and reception environment allows for more aggressive experimentation with new content that meets the needs of audiences in the media age at the interface of performance and video technologies.[7] Changes in theater in this era require groundbreaking creativity.

The change in the way technology reaches out to people once created a sense of crisis for the offline theater. Research on the development of physical theater in the post-epidemic era points out that the presence of theater will become thin, but it is an extreme idea to predict that the networking of performances will kill theater. The onlineization of performance is essentially predicated on a facility called a theater. Without the major facilities and equipment of a theater, online performances are not possible.[8] We have also seen the emergence and gradual maturation of digital media technologies such as OTT, and creative answers from theater operators, with NTCK Online providing a worthy case study. Some scholars point out that the space of digital performance exhibits the heterogeneity and dynamism of technological convergence, which are characterized by three features: multimedia, telematics and universality.[9] From this feature it can be considered that online theater, a digital performance space, is just a kind of window to the physical theater. Often we discuss the concept of online theater, referring to the extension of the physical theater. Online theatre does not exist to replace the physical theatre, and the social scene and functions of the physical theatre cannot be completely digitized.

4.3 The possibility of online theater

The current model of online theater of NTCK is to develop the copyright of its own classic theater works, innovate the content online, and pay on demand on the OTT platform, which is still in its preliminary stage of technology and contents development, and is closer to theater than to film in terms of experience and content. As a creative workplace with a high degree of humanism, a theater fosters a more respectful, dedicated and emotionally close relationship between internal participants, researchers and participants to maintain the principle of "creative justice" in art venues.[10] As an extension of online theater, the service and ritual of theater viewing retains the "humanistic" characteristics of the physical theater as an artistic venue.

Streaming media with theater art style, theater-style viewing atmosphere created, adapted to a wider range of special people, these and traditional OTT has a different, retaining the role of theater to connect people and social life, providing a ritual and humanistic care. In terms of technology, with the emergence and use of augmented reality technology in online theater, the future of online audiences will also be able to enjoy immersive theater, Steve Dixon believes that VR technology and theater and performance like a match made in heaven. VR provides an ideal technical medium for the performing arts, which can be used to enhance the core elements of the theater experience, including visual spectacle, imaginary worlds and morphing space body, and most importantly, to immerse the audience. The most important thing is to immerse the audience in it.[11] With the conception of the future of online theater and the development of technology, there is still room for exploration of online theater in terms of technology, content development and operation methods.

5. Conclusion

Digital technology can provide consumers with high-quality content and convenient viewing methods. By establishing their own OTT platforms, theaters can better disseminate artworks and protect their copyright interests, allowing theater art to go out of the theater while lowering the barrier for audiences to consume drama products. As online becomes a norm, it is foreseeable that more public or private theaters around the world will also attempt to convey artworks through OTT in the future. The case of Korea National Theatre's online theater shows us that developing a wider group of audiences, focusing on the needs of those who cannot go into the physical theater, using digital technology and creativity can make classic art works more widely distributed, and innovative business models consider the fact that operating an online theater while the physical theater will also benefit, which has implications for more practitioners and researchers in different art industries.

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